

## Guardian Chapter: 4

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Dragon City University's old main building, built in the 1910s, was now at least a hundred years old. Lush woods saturated the campus, some towering over every building, all which were built in a Western architectural style and were particularly ancient.

Only the administration building which had only been built these recent years near the west gate was relatively taller, going past layers upon layers of trees. Amongst this field of old buildings, it stuck out like a sore thumb and completely destroyed the aesthetic of the campus.

Professor Shen said that he didn't recognize this student and offered to take them to the office to investigate.

Zhao Yunlan was amazed by the modernized office building. It had eighteen floors, he realized without counting.

In the prior years, property developers always used to avoid buildings with eighteen floors. But after the economy boomed and property prices kept rising, people started caring less about superstition and more about money.

Only those who knew the business would spot the problem right away.

Perhaps due to the air conditioning, a sudden chilling breeze came gushing forward as soon as one entered the office building. The cat Da Qing shivered a bit, extended its claws and tightly grabbed hold of Zhao Yunlan.

"The student card says Faculty of Mathematics. The office is on the top floor," said Shen Wei, leading the two into the elevator.

Zhao Yunlan suddenly asked, "Professor Shen, you don't seem very curious about this incident. There is nothing you'd like to ask?"

With his head slightly bent, Shen Wei replied softly, "I respect the dead, and I will do whatever I can to help you solve this case but I don't need to know the details."

Zhao Yunlan, occasionally stroking the cat, continued, "Rarely do we meet good citizens like you. Even Da Qing seems to have taken a liking to you."

Shen Wei smiled gently, "It's what I should do."

Zhao Yunlan remained silent for awhile and glanced at Shen Wei. He'd noticed that there was something unusual about the professor; he had been avoiding eye contact ever since they'd locked eyes with each other earlier.

The elevator abruptly stopped at the fourth floor and the lights started to flicker. Panicked, Guo Changcheng looked at Chief Zhao in desperation. But Zhao Yunlan was awfully calm, still intently scrutinizing the Professor.

A creepy voice, that of a male's, echoed through the elevator, "Professor Shen, what brings you to the eighteenth floor?"

Shen Wei flatly replied, "There was an accident in school. These two are from the MPS. I'm taking them to the Faculty of Mathematics for some inquiries."

"Oh..." The voice appeared to be rather slow-witted, only replying after a long pause, "Right, take care."

Suddenly, the elevator returned to normal and the lights turned back on... as if nothing had happened in the first place.

"Scared?" Shen Wei turned around, still avoiding Zhao Yunlan, and explained to Guo Changcheng, "That was the security guard. Last semester, a student jumped off the building from the top floor. So ever since then, whoever's not from the faculty will be questioned before they can go up to the eighteenth floor."

Guo Changcheng giggled in embarrassment, feeling relieved, "And here I thought it was..."

"A ghost?" Shen Wei asked half-jokingly.

Guo Changcheng's face turned pale and taut.

Zhao Yunlan, though, had other worries on his mind.

This office building with terrible Feng Shui and a professor who inexplicably avoided eye contact were both equally bizarre.

As for the responsible security guard? Perhaps he wasn't just a security guard after all...

Finally, they arrived at the eighteenth floor, all the way at the top of the building. The entire floor was empty. Being as gloomy and frigidly humid as it was, not even a mosquito or gecko would ever consider settling here.

Zhao Yunlan inadvertently sneezed.

Shen Wei swiftly turned around and asked, "Have you caught a cold?"

Though he avoided direct eye contact with Zhao Yunlan still, his query was surprisingly genuine.

Perhaps he possessed some sort of unique charisma but Professor Shen's every movement seemed extremely gentle. Whilst his eyes were unfocused and murky, they were not unsettling to look at.

Zhao Yunlan rubbed his nose slightly.

"No, I am just allergic to the smell of mind-boggling, never-ending math homework."

Shen Wei wore a kind and reserved smile.

"Don't laugh at me," Zhao Yunlan began jokingly, "I'm telling the truth, Professor Shen. When I was a student, none of the teachers liked me. My class teacher even said that I would grow up to be a gangster! Who would have thought that I would end up where I am today? When I saw him again years later, can you guess what he said to me?"

Shen Wei, listening with interest, "What did he say?"

"That cynical old man said, 'You see Zhao, I was right. You've become a uniformed gangster'."

Perhaps due to his experience as a high-tier officer, Chief Zhao was well versed with the courtesy of small talk. Just the "math homework" joke had gotten Guo Changcheng to loosen up. Possibly resonating with the Chief, he followed behind him more eagerly.

But as for Professor Shen... his expression as he listened to Zhao Yunlan was one filled with such attentiveness and interest that Zhao Yunlan began to have an illusion that what he spoke of was about some highly complex and important issue that Shen Wei needed to dedicate all his attention towards, rather than some simple small talk.

But as he listened, he never once looked at Zhao Yunlan. And despite the fact that his smile appeared to be warm and courteous, the more Zhao Yunlan looked at it, the more he realized how formalized it was. It looked as though it was stencilled in.

Zhao Yunlan was suspicious of his ability to smile continuously.

The three walked and talked like this for awhile. Their footsteps resounded through the floor and echoed down the corridors. Their laughter engulfed the sound of their footsteps... while obscuring the subtle treads of a fourth person.

Rustling and coarse, like the sound of a pair of soft-soled cloth shoes.

The administrative office building was built in the style of the so-called “tower buildings”, with the elevator in the middle and each floor in a circular shape around the centre.

As they moved forward, Guo Changcheng realized that Chief Zhao’s wristwatch had undergone an uncanny change. At the centre of the watch where the hour and minute hands met, a touch of crimson rose began to spread like ripples on water.

Guo Changcheng, after hesitating for a while, finally whispered, “Chief... Chief Zhao, your watch...”

“What? Has it turned red?” Zhao Yunlan turned back wearing his iconic smirk, “Do you know why?”

Guo Changcheng shook his head.

Zhao Yunlan chuckled jokingly.

“Ghosts love red, and since this building has bad feng shui, there is probably something evil lurking in the shadows, playing tricks on us...”

Guo Changcheng’s face turned pale. He rigidly turned his head to look at the watch once more but this time instead, he saw the reflection of an old lady. She was... rather plump, dressed in all black and was vacantly glaring at him!

Guo Changcheng’s feet halted.

Zhao Yunlan laughed and turned a small switch on the watch. The case, suddenly filled with mist, washed away the bloody colour. The wristwatch instantly returned back to normal, no blood red, and no female ghost.

“Have you never seen colour-changing watches? Silly kid, so gullible.” Zhao Yunlan teased the trainee, but then swiftly turned to Shen, “Professor Shen, you’re an intellectual so you must not believe in ghosts?”

Professor Shen, still avoiding eye contact with Zhao Yunlan, adjusted his glasses and slowly replied, “As the old saying goes, ‘The wise never speaks of that which is out of this world’. Nobody knows if there are ghosts so there is no need to dwell on this. If we can’t even understand our own lives fully, why should we care about what’s beyond us?”

A very educated reply but it didn’t seem like Shen Wei really answer the question after all. As Zhao Yunlan failed to get anything out of the professor, he changed the subject, “Professor Shen, you teach Arts, I suppose?”

“Yes, I teach Chinese and a few Arts electives.”

“I see... By the way, I heard from some friends in the property business that new residential buildings nowadays rarely use the structure of this building, only giant commercial buildings do. It really is bad Feng Shui; very little natural light indoors and also difficult to maintain.” Zhao Yunlan took out a pack of cigarettes, “Is smoking forbidden here?”

Shen Wei shook his head. Zhao Yunlan took a cigarette and light it with one hand, with the other still in his pocket. A cloud of white smoke swivelled out of his mouth.

Shen Wei frowned, “Tobacco is bad for your health. Chief Zhao is still so young, you better not smoke too much.”

Zhao Yunlan gently smiled and didn't respond. Smoke covered his face and obscured his expression. The ashes from his cigarette landed on Shen Wei's shadow.

Zhao Yunlan, looking at the ground while fanning the smoke away, replied with, “This job is rather stressful, I often have to work overtime. So inevitably, I have some bad habits that I just can't get rid of.”

Shen Wei looked as if he wanted to say something but he simply frowned and then, oddly enough, changed the subject.

“There aren't many faculties that use the old main campus. Only a few floors in this building are occupied, the other rooms are all vacant; round this corner and we're there.”

Shadowy and frigid places were prone to mould and moss, and perhaps... other things as well.

For unknown reasons, the corners in this building were close to right angles, whilst the corridors circled around the centre, giving the interior a most bizarre structure. Also, in the convoluted and narrow corridors, the possibility of frequently bumping into each other was extremely high.

Shen Wei led the group ahead and Zhao Yunlan, holding the cat, followed behind, and finally with Guo Changcheng bringing up the rear. As they approach the corner, Guo Changcheng had an inkling that something might leap out of the shadows. Uneased, he stared intently at the shadowy corner.

Suddenly, Guo Changcheng realized that within the shadows, something was... moving.

It was as if someone was hiding within the shadows, and from that darkness emerged a shape... a hand!